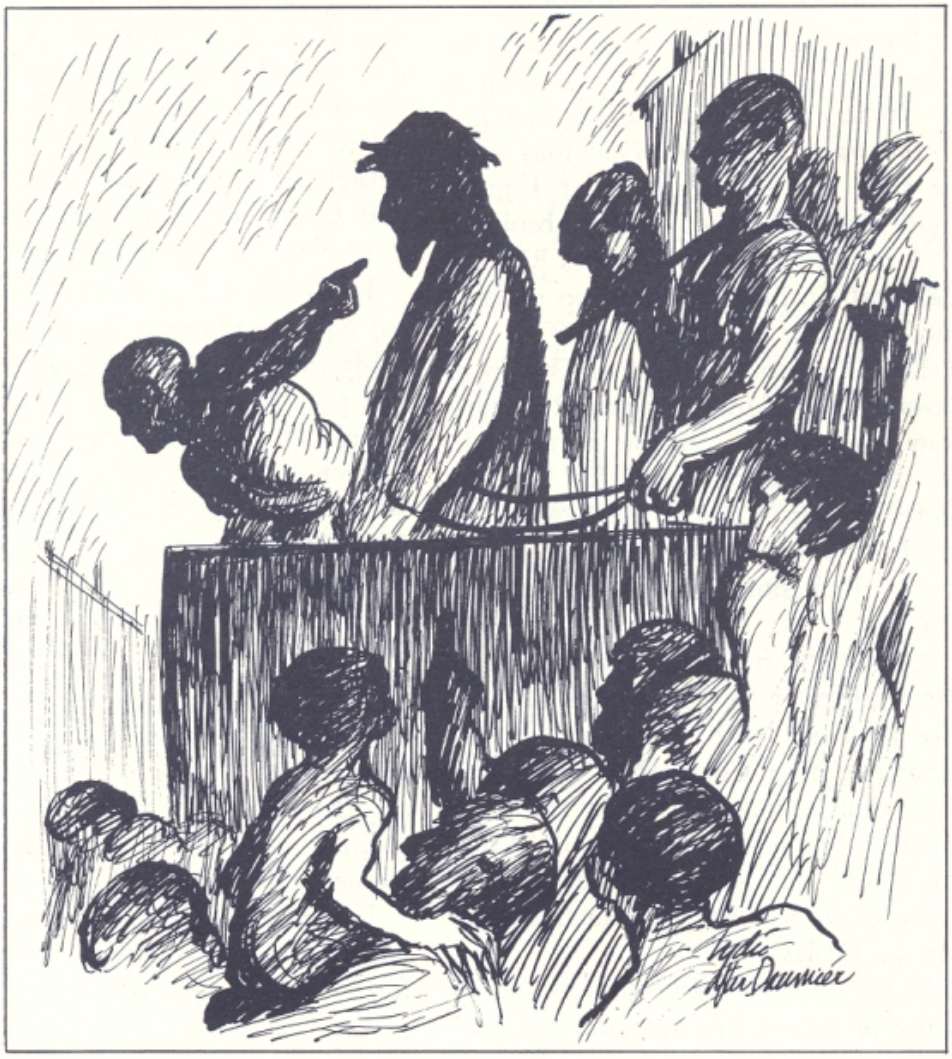
RESTORATION REVIEW



The Christ—Everything man could want in a God.
Everything God could want in a man.

Volume 6, No. 4 **April, 1964**

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DOES ROME CHANGE?

All my life I have heard from my Protestant teachers that the Church of Rome cannot and will not change: *Rome never changes!* This may well be true, but as I grow older I grow more and more skeptical of absolutes.

A recent news item pictures Richard Cardinal Cushing, Archbishop of Boston, kneeling in silent prayer at the Trinity Protestant Episcopal Church in Boston. He addressed some 200 protestant clergymen in the parish hall. In his address he called for Catholic and Protestant unity at the "grassroots" level as a supplement to the higher level discussion going on among scholars.

Recently in my home town of Dallas the Roman Catholic bishop of that city lunched with ministers in the basement of a Christian Church, and they talked together about the Ecumenical Council in Rome and Christian unity in general. They prayed together. It was the first such gathering in Dallas.

These are only two instances among many of recent date that indicate that a dialogue has begun that is long past due. Regardless of how much "change" this indicates, it is certainly a step in the direction when a gentleman with a red cap can and will pray in a Protestant church, and when Roman and Protestant clergy and laymen can lunch, talk and pray together.

It all leads me to ask: *how about us; how much can we change?* Are we ready to kneel in an Episcopal Church and pray for unity? We might start by doing so in our own Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. While visiting Westminister Abbey in London last summer I was impressed with a sign that read: *Prayers for Christian Unity in this Chapel Each Thursday at* 2 *p.m.*

When I see a sign that reads like that at a Church of Christ, that will be the day! It may be as pertinent to say that the Church of Christ never changes as to say that the Church of Rome never changes.

It is because I believe that men can and will change that this journal goes forth each month. And that is why I solicit your help.

THREE CONVERSIONS

It may appear farfetched to speak of a person being in need of *three* conversions, but I wish to suggest that there is an important sense in which this is true. I speak of being converted to *the church,* to *the Christ,* and to *the world,* though not necessarily in that order. It is unlikely that these would come together. They are a matter of Christian growth. Those of us who are so stunted in our Christian development that we are yet *carnal* in our thinking may never have experienced any of these conversions. It is likely, however, that once a man has *really* experienced anyone of them he will go on to experience the others.

By conversion to the church I refer to the awakening of what the *ecclesia* of Christ on earth really is. Christianity begins to look different when one can get beyond the pale of his own sectarian confines and sees the *catholic* church. He discovers a brotherhood much larger than he supposed existed, which embraces those he once excluded. This comes when he rises above partyism and sees men in terms of their sonship to God rather than in terms of party loyalty.

Passages like the following become more meaningful to the one who is converted to the universality of the church:

> "Through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Eph. 3:10-11)
>
> "I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named . . . " (Eph. 3:14-15)
>
> "You may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth." (1 Tim. 3:15)
>
> "He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent." (Col. 3:18)

One might take his concordance and look up the numerous references to "all the saints" as a further illustration of this point. For instance, Eph. 3:18-19 reads: "that you may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God."

Surely "the fulness of God" in human hearts is not restricted to those saints that wear our particular brand. A deeper concept of "all the saints" will cut across both racial and sectarian lines, for it will acknowledge a brotherhood that includes all who are *in Christ.* Churches and schools that draw a line on color, which most of *our* churches and schools do, simply are not converted to the church as the Christ intended it --- or they simply are not converted (period).

Like the Copernican revolution that shook the foundations of people's thinking in the time of the Renaissance, an awakening to the true nature of *the body of Christ* will jar us loose from our narrowness. It was disconcerting when people learned that the earth is but a small part of the universe instead of the center of it. Some of us need to learn that God's kingdom on earth would not be too much worse off if we were not part of it, and that we should be thankful to be the small part that we are.

The second conversion is to *the Christ*, and the point here is that so many of us may spend a lifetime in "the Lord's work" and be converted to the work rather than to the Lord. "As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith." (Col. 2:6-7)

I am not speaking of the *initial* conversion to the Lord which comes through faith and baptism, but to the *growth* in the Christ that leads to such spiritual profundity as "For me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). While we are urged to "Come to him . . ." (1 Pet. 2:4), there is a real question as to whether we have done so. There can be a big difference between being a minister of religion and a minister of Christ. Think of those words: *minister of Christ.* More frequently these days do I ask myself if I am truly a servant of the Lord or a servant of my own selfish interest.

Some may misunderstand my suggestion that we are to be converted to the world too, and yet it is this point that needs the most emphasis. It is true that in some respects "the world is too much with us," but it is also true that in some respects we are not sufficiently worldly. *Worldliness* is a much abused term, a term not in the Bible incidentally, though "worldly" does appear in some versions and always means *carnal*. A monk who says prayers and counts beads all day, completely shut off from the world in his ascetic and celibate life, may be very *worldly* in the carnal sense; while a business man on Wall Street may be truly spiritual and free of carnality (worldliness).

And yet that Christian business man is *worldly* in an important sense: *he is engaged in pursuits that make the world a better place to live.* And he is doing it for the Christ's sake, and because of his love for God and man. It was world-mindedness that caused God to give his own son. "God so loved *the world* . . . " teaches us that we too are to love it. True, we are to "love not the world or the things in the world" (1 John 2:15), but we are to be lights in it (Phil. 2:15) and the salt of it (Matt. 5:13). True, we are not to be *of* the world but we are *in* it, and the Lord has sent us into it (John 17:16-18). We are in the world for a purpose: " . . . that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (John 15:16). That fruit can include such things as honorable business practices on Wall Street, skillful heart surgery in Madison, unbiased jury service in Dallas, running a farm in Georgia, and selling groceries in Titusville. All for God and all because of God through Christ! Jesus was a blessing to the world into which he came. He was here to make it better; yea, he was here to save it. That is what we are here for --- to save it!

CAMPBELL AND JEFFERSON

We appreciate the review of our monograph on *Alexander Campbell and Thomas Jefferson: A study of Two Old Virginians* in a recent issue of "The Christian" magazine, published in St. Louis by the Disciples of Christ. The reviewer, B. Clifford Hendricks, says of the comparative study:

> Professor Garrett contends that there was closer agreement in their religious philosophies than Campbell was aware of. He mentions that Campbell was disturbed by Jefferson's regard for the writings of Thomas Paine and Voltaire and also that Campbell charged Jefferson with "repudiating the Bible . . . and dreaming of a happy people without a faith, a hope or a desire for Christian immortality." However, the author thinks that if Campbell had been permitted to read Jefferson's letters he would have rated his Deism as a Christian sort . . . calling, as it did, for a revival of primitive Christianity."

We take this occasion to urge you to read this 32-page booklet on a subject that will not only deal with interesting comparisons between two great men, but it will provide background information on our nation's struggle for civil rights, religious freedom, and free schools for all. We are amazed to think of what has happened in our great nation since the time of Jefferson and Campbell. Virginia was not only a slave state; it was also without religious freedom, having an official state church, and there were no public schools. Jefferson and Campbell did something about all these conditions. Our booklet serves to show that Campbell was far more than the leader of a religious movement. He was truly a Christian statesman, and his wide variety of interests revealed his conception of what all is involved in a restoration of the ancient order.

The monograph on Campbell and Jefferson is available at our office at 50 cents.

CAMPBELL NOT PAROCHIAL

The following announcement appeared in the 1844 *Millennial Harbinger.* It should be of special interest to those of the Restoration Movement who restrict the faculties of their colleges to "Church of Christ" professors.

> Brother Young, who has been since the commencement of the session in charge of the Preparatory Department at the Family Mansion of Bethany College, has been induced, by the continual solicitations of the Baptist Church in the city of Trenton, N. J., to return to that State, and to resume his labors in that community.
>
> In the selection of our professors and teachers, we have not been at all exclusive. Brother Young is a Baptist minister, from London, of liberal views, and very popular talents as a speaker. He has often, during his stay here, spoken in the church at Bethany with much acceptance; and he will carry with him the Christian regards and the prayers of the church for his usefulness and prosperity.

We have also a Presbyterian professor in our department of the languages, very highly esteemed for his virtues and for the faithful discharge of his professional duties. We are always pleased to cultivate the most intimate friendship with all good and useful men, of all denominations, reputable for their intelligence and piety, and would be glad to be frequently visited at the College hall by respectable preachers of all Protestant denominations. Why do the Presbyterian and Methodistic ministry visit us so seldom?

Alexander Campbell

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BLESSED DEATH: THE CHRISTIAN'S ATTITUDE

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" . . .

Blessed death! This is hardly the feeling that prevails concerning death generally. Should this be the attitude of the Christian? After all, the Bible not only speaks of the sting and victory that death has over us, but it also associates death with evil (Deut. 30:15) and refers to "the bitterness of death" (1 Sam. 15:32) . Psalms 55:4 reads: "My heart is in anguish within me, the terrors of death have fallen upon me."

A friend who recently experienced his first loss of a close loved one remarked: "I did not know death could be so ugly and cruel." The man who said this is a good Christian with a lively hope of immortality. Did he have the wrong attitude toward the death of his father who died a Christian?

Death is an experience that is to be prepared for as much as any other great moment in life. Cicero, one of the Stoics who dedicated themselves to the understanding of such mysteries as death, defined philosophy as the discipline which teaches man how to die. Another philosopher, Montaigne, contended that it takes greater moral stamina to die than it does to live. Socrates thought of his life as a preparation for death. When his executioner asked him if he were ready to take the poison, Socrates replied: "Do you not know that I have been prepared for death all my life."

Part of the reason why death seems ugly and cruel may be because we have made such little preparation for it. Funeral customs may add to the pain of losing a loved one. Funerals are not only unnecessarily expensive, but unnecessarily cruel. When Abraham lost a loved one, he woefully cried out: "Bury my dead out of my sight." This we do, but we probably make too much of it.

When our father passed away, one of my brothers who lived in a distant state remarked that it would be so much more sensible if the mortician were instructed simply to take the body, prepare it for burial, and inter it at the designated place, thus sparing the family the pain of burying a loved one. As it was, my brother, shocked by the sudden news of his

father's passing, had to make a long, strenuous trip, suffering all the expense of both travel and missing work for several days. And for what? He got to see his living loved ones, but it was hardly a time for an enjoyable visit. There was the ordeal of funeral arrangements, sitting with the body hour upon hour. Add to that the funeral service with all the words and songs ("Is any among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise." Jas. 5:13).

Well-meaning friends gathered, all of them saying about the same thing over and over, which may hurt more than it helps. We stood around and waited and watched as they carted the casket here and there. Then we paraded through the city in a long line of cars out to the cemetery where we went through more of the same thing.

My brother had a point: it was cruel. It might have made much more sense if the body could have immediately been disposed of by professional people with perhaps representatives of the family present. Then the family at a more favorable time could have had a gathering some weeks later in memory of their father.

In the case of our mother's passing it was even more cruel, not only because it was *mother,* but also because we had to return at such a time to the grave of our father and witness the two graves together. Then to our horror we learned that the grave had been dug at the wrong place. So we conveyed our dead mother's body back to town (and we were all away from home in the small town that our parents called home) to a different funeral home where the body was kept for the night. The next day the body was properly interred at the right place with only two representatives of the family standing by. Even after two years it makes me shudder to think about it all.

In some of the cold countries of Europe, where the ground freezes too hard to dig into, it is customary for the mortician to take the body and store it until the ground thaws. The family is not even around when the burial takes place, and nobody thinks anything about it. In our own country I have known of some distraught widows, so terribly burdened with the tragic death of their companions, subjected to two or three funerals in as many different places before the body is finally laid to rest in some distant place. The fact is that there is a lot of nonsense about our funeral practices.

It might be much more Christian if the body could be buried quickly and quietly after a simple service right there in the room where the loved one dies. The elders of the congregation and a very few other select friends, along with what members of the family would be close by, could gather for prayers to God and thanksgiving for his saintly life. It is no time to be singing! Then let the body be taken *then* and buried. It might be fitting for a close friend or two, or the elders of the church, attend the body to its resting place. Spare the family! Then later — weeks later — there could be a public service in memory of the deceased if the life of the person would warrant it. The family could then gather under more edifying conditions.

To the Christian death can be and should be a blessed experience, especially his own death; and once death is viewed as *beni mori* by the one who does the dying, it will become more bearable even to his loved ones. “And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth.’ ‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!” (Rev. 14:13) The blessing, “Let me die the death of the righteous” (Num. 23:10), is surely to be desired, but this can come only by recognizing that death is part of God’s plan for us.

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Psa. 116:15) is a scripture that should help us to see death as a beautiful experience. But the most edifying truth of all to the Christian is that God through the Messiah destroyed death. The Christian really never dies at all! “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). Jesus asked his disciples if they really believed this, and so we might ask ourselves; for if we truly believe that through Christ death has no more power over us, we are indeed “more than conquerors” through him.

Heb. 2:14-15 shows how the Christ took upon himself the likeness of man in order “that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil” By this means he delivers from death all those who “through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.” This shows that the Christ is the answer to our ugly and painful experience with death as he is to all our other problems.

We need to give some attention to the problem of the so-called “death agony” or the ordeal of dying. None of us likes to think about that moment when we draw our last breath of life. We suppose that the act of dying is a cruel experience. This impression comes from such things as “the death rattle,” muscular contortions, and facial grimaces that are often present in the dying. We watch all this and suppose that the dying one is in pain. The best medical opinion is that this is not true. The rattle and the contortions are only physical, the reactions of a dying organism. Dr. J. R. Cavanaugh in *The Catholic Nurse* says, “Mentally, when death is near, his state of mind is peaceful. Dying is easy for the dying.” He says “the death agony” is only imaginary. Pain and death rarely go together.

Sir William Osler, the famous: British physician, says that pain rarely attends death. He tells of the case of a man who passed deep into the valley of death only to return, and he spoke of “the dream-like delicious sensation of the profound collapse in which he almost died.”

Dr. Cavanaugh urges his Roman Catholic nurses to view death with dignity. He insists that the patient whose case is hopeless should not be subjected to endless oxygen tents, needlessly, for he dies more like some complicated experimental animal than as a human being. He accuses the large metropolitan hospital of making of dying “an ordeal which has somewhat deprived death of its dignity.”

Cavanaugh raises the question of whether life-prolonging measures are moral, pointing to the fact that Hippocrates, the father of medicine, forbade the administration of remedies to those beyond hope. He rejects euthanasia (mercy killings) but advocates what he calls *agathansia,* which means "a good death." This is to permit the patient to die naturally and with decorum.

The Christian is concerned with the problem of how to die gracefully and peacefully as well as with how to live a life worthy of that manner of death. One of the finest illustrations of noble dying is Socrates, who lived four centuries before Christ, a man described by one of his contemporaries as "the wisest, justest and best." And after 2,000 years of Christianity we have to concede that he knew more about dying than most Christians do.

On the day of his execution he talked calmly with his disciples about the meaning of life and death ("When I have drunk the poison I shall leave you and go to the joys of the blessed") and soul and body ("Let a man be of good cheer about his soul, who having cast away the pleasures and ornaments of the body as alien to him and working harm rather than good, has sought after the pleasures of knowledge; and has arrayed his soul, not in some foreign attire, but in her own proper jewels, temperance, justice, courage, and nobility") , and of the world to come ("They go from hence *into* the other world and returning hither, are born again from the dead").

"How shall we bury you?" his disciples asked of Socrates. The humor of his reply reflects his wholesome attitude about death: "In any way you like, but you will have to catch me first!" He was trying to teach his grief-stricken disciples that death is but a journey, not a cessation of life. He added: "Do not say, 'We have buried Socrates', for these will be false words . . . say that you are burying my body only, and do with that whatever is usual."

If Socrates could have that kind of faith in a pagan world long before Christianity (and it makes a good question to ask *how* he got the faith!), should we not have even a richer view of death?

Someone has said, "A man who is born once will die twice; a man who is born twice will die once."

"We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8)

"As it is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phillip. 1:20-21) — *The Editor*

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HOW TO COMMUNE WITH GOD

"Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication." (Eph. 6:18)

A life that is in communion with God is something like a garden in that it must be cultivated. Gardens do not come up over night; neither is a life lived "in the Spirit" a sudden thing. Reading the Bible may be communion with God, but it may not be; it depends on the heart. Many of us who are so busy doing religious things may seldom, if ever, really commune with God.

The person whose spiritual exercises are confined to certain expressions of public worship in some building is not likely to be one who knows what it means to commune with God. It is when one can lay his soul bare before the Lord in the confines of his own secret chamber that communion with God becomes real. Devotional readings, both the Bible and other thoughtful material, can also be soul-searching experiences with God.

To think about God is to commune with Him: to think of His goodness, mercy, loving kindness; to think of His acts in history, especially what He has done for mankind through the Christ. To think of Him as concerned for the sparrow's fall and the very hairs of our head is to commune with Him. He is our creator and sustainer; He is the giver of life and the ruler of the universe. We live, move and have our being in Him. He is Spirit and He is love; He is Truth and He is Life. He is Father and we are His children. Above all else He gave us the Christ, the blessed Saviour.

It is this kind of consciousness of God that makes communion a reality. Spinoza, a Jewish philosopher, is known in history as "the God-intoxicated man," and it might be some such idea that Paul had in view when he wrote: "Don't get your stimulus from wine (for there is always the danger of excessive drinking), but let the Spirit stimulate your souls." (Eph. 5:18, Phillips)

Paul is saying that we are to be drunk with God rather than with wine. It is as God-intoxicated people that we experience the holy thrill of communion.

This is the kind of person who is prepared to worship God in the public assembly. It means that the worship of God is essentially a personal thing. The devotion that is already in the Christian's heart when he goes to church is what gives validity to the so-called "acts of public worship." Something important is happening when Spirit-filled children of God assemble for a joint-expression of a devotion that already dwells within each of them.

Well-meaning, though perhaps lukewarm, Christians sometimes complain that they often have trouble "getting into" the worship services — their minds wander, or they seem only to be going through outward forms. When they leave the assembly they feel they haven't worshipped at all. The difficulty may be that they have never really learned to commune with God in their private and family lives, and when this is the case all the church-going in the world is not likely to change this condition. We are saying that if worship is not first personal it is not likely to find satisfactory public expression.

This is not to say that the nature of the public worship is not very important, nor that one might not have an experience with God who has previously been ineffective in his personal efforts. But we are saying that communion with God is basically a personal experience that should begin in one's own heart, and then find nurture in one's own closet and with one's own family, and finally with others of like precious faith in public gatherings. But for one who truly communes with God nothing will ever take the place of his private (and even secret) devotions.

We would emphasize the secrecy of the devotional life, for it is only here that man is truly alone with his heavenly Father. When one closes himself off from the rest of the world and communes with God alone, he is doing what Jesus teaches in Matt. 6:6: "When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." In the same context the Master stresses the point of secrecy in alms-giving and fasting as well as prayer: " . . . that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (Matt. 6:18)

Every child needs to be with his father alone. There are those things that he can talk about only with his father. And how true this is of the child of God and his heavenly Father! He needs those sweet, tender moments of silence before his Father alone. He will want to say things to God that he cannot and should not say to anyone else. It is only in these private and secret devotions that his soul will be laid bare before his God. And religion will never be real until this happens!

Two of the greatest moments of the Bible are incidents where a child of God laid his agonizing soul naked before God, and from those incidents we have two precious principles respecting communion with God. One is the publican's plea: "God, be merciful to me a sinner." The other is Jesus' petition in Gethsemane: "Nevertheless, Father, not my will, but thine be done."

When in the confines of his own heart a man can pray like that — when he humbles himself as a sinner before God, and when he yields his own will to the will of God — he is in communion with God.

The Experience that Isaiah had in the temple provides another imperative for communion with God. It was not until he realized the holiness of God that he was able to see his own sinful wretchedness. Perhaps it works the other way too: when one can see his own sinfulness he is better able to see the holiness of God. Isaiah saw the Lord "high and lifted up," and he heard angels proclaiming: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of glory." Smoke filled the temple and the foundations trembled at the angelic voices.

Perhaps we need not look for such an experience as Isaiah had, for he was receiving a prophetic call. But surely any child of God should have experiences that are just as real and meaningful and just as precious. More of us might have such meaningful communal experience if we prayed as did Isaiah: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" (Isa. 6:1-6)

There are different ways of "seeing God, though of course no one has ever seen Him in the fullest sense, according to John 1:18. St. Francis saw Him in the pitiful face of a despised leper. Others have seen Him in the awful slums of our great cities and in the hospitals among the diseased and wounded. It may be true that man is never closer to God than when he is among unfortunate souls of earth, seeking to alleviate suffering and anguish. God told the prophet Ezekiel to put a mark upon every person in Jerusalem "who sigh and groan over all the abominations committed in it." Surely we too need to be marked of God as people who *care*, for if we have not yet learned to weep and groan over human misery and sin, we have not yet communed with God with sufficient depth.

Since this essay proposes to tell how to commune with God, which may be a proposal far too proud, some practical suggestions should be made for the reader's consideration.

1. *Find a moment to be alone with God.*

This might be early in the morning when the rest of the family is asleep, or it might be at a coffee-break at work. But at some moment every day the child of God should be alone with God. This can of course be a mental experience even amidst a busy, clanging world, or as one drives along the highway or rides the bus to work. The point is that there should be a definite conscious effort to put aside time (even if but a few minutes) for private and secret communion with the Father.

"At midnight I rise to praise thee, because of thy righteous ordinances." (Psa. 119:62)

2. *Read the Bible as a personal experience with God.*

In reading through a book like Ezekiel, for instance, one should not simply think of a prophet writing to people in the long ago, but he should say to himself: God is speaking to me through Ezekiel. And so what is there in this book that will enrich my life and help me to help others? Whatever one is reading, it is well to keep reading until there is some point that strikes home for his own life, then take this thought with you throughout the day as God's special word for you. Even in a difficult, obscure book like Ezekiel there are many passages that can be used this way. Ezek. 11:19 for example: "I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh." The child of God in any age can do a lot of thinking about that verse.

3. *Pray to God as Father*

This should be the most natural thing for a Christian, and yet there are many Christians who have trouble "getting through" to God, thus feeling frustrated in their efforts. Many just don't try to pray privately, except during an emergency. William Barclay of Glasgow University (whom this writer met while in Scotland last summer) has a book called The Plain Man's Book of Prayers, which is most helpful to one who wishes to learn how to pray more meaningfully. Prof. Barclay says there are laws to prayer just as to everything else. Here they are: (1) We must be honest in prayer; (2) We must be very definite in prayer — don't simply ask for forgiveness; confess the particular sins; (3)

There can be no real prayer without self-examination; (4) We must remember in prayer that God always knows best; (5) God will not do for us that which we can do for ourselves.

The disciples asked Jesus to show them how to pray. We should be more than willing to learn how to pray better from those who are people of prayer. Barclay's book contains morning and evening prayers for an entire month, plus prayers for special occasions. It is most edifying to read these meditations with God. We produce one of them here just to illustrate. An evening prayer goes this way:

O God, our Father, bless those for whom life is unhappy.

Bless those who are underpaid and overworked, those who never have enough, and who are always tired.

Bless those who are always taken for granted, and who are never thanked, and praised, and appreciated, as they ought to be.

Bless those who have been hurt by life, those who have been wounded by the malice of their enemies, or by faithlessness of their friends.

Bless those who have been disappointed in something on which they had set their hearts.

Bless those for whom life is lonely and empty, because someone they loved has been taken away.

Bless those whom illness or weakness has handicapped or laid aside.

Bless those who are worried about those they love.

Thou knowest the needs of each one of us, and thou knowest the secrets of our inmost hearts. Help us this night to cast all our burdens upon Thee, certain that Thou carest for us, and sure that Thou wilt help. This we ask for Thy love's sake. AMEN.

One will find Barclay's short morning prayers soul-searching experiences. In our home we sometime read these as morning meditations.

All through today, O God, help me to be,

Quick to praise, and slow to criticise;

Quick to forgive, and slow to condemn;

Quick to share, and slow to refuse to give.

Grant me all through today,

Complete control of my temper, that I may be slow to anger;

Complete control of my tongue, that I may speak no hasty word.

So grant that all through today I may help everyone and hurt no one, so that I may find true joy in living: through Jesus Christ my Lord. AMEN.

4. S*ee all experiences as the work of God.*

The child of God should think of going to work for God on Monday morning. If he cannot believe that the job he has is something that God wants done, then he should find the kind of work that he believes to be to the glory of God. Whether he be teacher, butcher, mechanic, lawyer or farmer the Christian should believe that this is God's work. Do it for Him, and work every day with this in mind. When we meet a new acquaintance, we should then and there breathe a prayer to God for him and thank God for the experience. And thank Him for every new task.

"Pray at all times in the Spirit" probably means that we are to live constantly in communion with God through his indwelling Spirit.

"Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." (Phil. 4:8) — *The Editor*

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MORE ON CHURCH OF CHRIST INTERPRETATION

Robert Meyers

One has no sooner seen his thoughts in cold print than he wishes he had added this point, or made that one stronger. New examples of the problem he wrote about parade themselves before his eyes and he wishes he might have known them in time to add them to the essay. New experiences modify or corroborate his comments and clamor for expression. This has happened to the present writer in connection with comments he made earlier in this journal on the subject of interpretation. (See Vol. 4, No.3) Now, more than a year later, he begs indulgence while he adds a postscript.

The very word "interpretation" has caused us endless trouble. Those in the Church of Christ wing of the Restoration movement, especially, have shunned this word like a plague. They are quick to claim that they do not interpret the Bible at all. It says what it means, and it means what it says: this is the rehearsed response. Their doctrine is simply "what the Bible says"; *your* doctrine, where it may differ, is an "interpretation." If you

protest that your interpretation may be as valid as theirs, they reply: “We don’t interpret; we just let it mean what it says.’” It takes no philosopher to see that this circular defense is perfect. Nothing can penetrate it. It rules out all room for honest differences, because it equates the Bible itself with its own understanding. Any attack upon that understanding (or interpretation) is regarded as a direct attack upon the Bible, and therefore upon God, its author.

Since I tried in the previous article to show that every man who reads or listens is involved in an interpretive act, whether he likes it or not, there is no point in going over that ground again. Interpretation means to “bring out the meaning of, to show understanding of, to explain, or to translate” words or actions. My Church of Christ friends cannot avoid being involved in this action, but they prefer to ignore it. It is not hard to find a reason. Once we admit that *we* interpret, to the best of our ability, we must also admit that *others* are probably doing the same thing and that our differences may not be due to ignorance and stubbornness on one side but to equally plausible possibilities for interpretation within the material itself. Since this would destroy our temple of security, we prefer not to do it. We take refuge behind any semantic quibble we can discover to avoid admitting that we, too, interpret.

It is ever possible to batter through this defensive wall and get our people to admit that they interpret as capably as they can, then it will quickly dawn upon them that it is possible for people to have honest differences of interpretation. We know this already about politics. We see often how a single event, standing before us all like a rock, is interpreted quite differently by men of equal intelligence and equal sincerity. That some of the interpreters will be charlatans, there is no doubt. That some will be ignorant of many relevant facts for good interpretation, no one would deny. But lined up on both sides, or on several sides, will be men of equal sincerity, truthfulness, and capacity. All that keeps one faction from hanging the other is that all of them acknowledge the problems inherent in attempting to *understand* an action.

In literary criticism, highly capable men with no apparent motives beyond the objective effort to understand, interpret masterpieces differently. One man sees Hemingway’s *Old Man of The Sea* as a piece of maudlin sentimentality, weak in plot, diction and character portrayal. Another argues persuasively that the little novel is the perfect essence of all Hemingway’s strengths as a writer and that he richly deserved having it mentioned by name when he won the Nobel Prize. In between are a host of opinions. Our only recourse in a situation like this is to read the book carefully, give sober heed to the critics, and make a synthesis which will accurately reflect our own conviction. By that conviction we should stand until we, or another, has disproved it.

Why should it be different with sacred literature? Any honest and perceptive person knows that through every century since the Book was written men of equal sincerity and wisdom have been unable to understand some of its crucial issues alike. One may claim that they should have until he is blue in the face, but the truth is that in twenty centuries men have not been able to do so. This should give us pause and make us wonder if all our strident exhortation will make them do so within our generation. Perhaps it is time to take a long, hard look at the problem of interpretation. We may want to overhaul our position.

A fascinating illustration of this problem showed up several months ago on the editorial page of the *Christian Chronicle*, a widely-circulated journal of Church of Christ activities. Calling passionately for a discussion of "the Negro issue," the editorial pleaded for more writing on this matter from Church of Christ preachers. It said that recently "two respected and distinguished ministers" in the Mid-South area of the paper's coverage wrote special articles on the subject in the same issue. Then came this revealing admission: "It is curious to note that these two men --- in all sincerity and with much good Biblical logic --- disagree with each other on the issue." It pointed out that both men relied for their arguments on "God's will" and that both men are scholarly.

This raises a most interesting question. If these two Church of Christ preachers study the same book with the same sincerity and ability, yet come up with contradictory answers, may we not have a solution to the vexing problem of religious differences? If *our own men* can understand the Bible differently on such a crucial issue, why is it that we expect all the rest of the religious world to see exactly as we do on other major matters?

Surely the force of this cannot be evaded by claiming the race problem is "nonessential"! This is our escape on many disagreements about interpretation. But the race problem is major. Nothing, in fact, has pulled American Christendom closer together in recent years than has this compelling, vital issue. One of the Church of Christ ministers mentioned in the editorial used verses suggesting that racial discrimination was a sin, so that salvation was actually at stake. The other found verses which proved to him that God *meant* for the whites and the negroes to have a "great gulf' between them. Obviously, if God meant this, then anyone who sought to destroy this God-ordained "gulf" would risk his sours salvation, too. It is apparent that to these two Bible students, the problem of racial discrimination is major. Each man is sure that his prooftext "means what it says, and says what it means!" Yet they cannot agree. Their interpretations differ.

Do we need any other proof of the truth that unity can only be achieved when men allow for differences of interpretation? Unity in diversity is possible; the unity of conformity never has been and never will be. By attempting to make conformity in interpretations the basis for unity, we have split our particular segment of the Restoration movement into some ten to twenty factions. We will go on splitting forever unless we learn the lesson which this difference about the Negro problem teaches us: that men of good will

and high intelligence may read the same and yet arrive at different conclusions. It isn't that God's revelation speaks with two voices; it is simply that man's interpretive power is affected by many factors and that one hardly ever finds two men on earth who are anywhere near alike.

When I talked about this problem in Dallas in July of 1963, a minister representing the Anti faction among us was deeply grieved at the suggestion that the Bible may be understood differently by honest men. He spoke with great power and massive scorn, saying, "The Bible says what it means, and means what it says, and you either believe it or you don't. That's all there is to it." Following which, he sat down with a triumphant flourish. There was an opportunity later to read Romans 16:20, 2 Cor. 13:12, 1 Thess. 5:26, and 1 Pet. 5:14 to him, with this question: "Do you command and practice the holy kiss? Does the Bible say what it means here? If it does, do you believe it or don't you?"

What happens at this juncture, of course, is that the beleaguered literalist begins at once to *interpret*. He claims that a handshake will do as well now, although he is quick to say that a similar change in *form* of communion or baptism or music will not do at all. He knows that the holy kiss was only a custom, destined to perish, although no one told him so and he cannot find any such comment in Holy Writ. But he knows it anyway, just as he knows that weekly communion was not just a custom but a universal and permanent injunction. Yet he does not interpret.

It is interesting, in view of these claims about "not interpreting," to read 2 Thess. 5:25-27. Paul says: "Brethren, pray for us." That imperative means what it says! Paul says: "I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren." That imperative means what it says! Sandwiched in between these two commandments, which mean just what they say, is a third: "Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss." That one does not mean what it says, and it is all right to change the form of it so long as we keep the spirit. How do we know?

Please be patient for one more example.

Our inconsistency is so immense that it has to be seen to be believed. In John 13, Jesus washes his disciples' feet after telling them that if He does not do this, they are not in fellowship with Him. Later he says: "Then if I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. I have set you an example: you are to do as I have done for you."

It is impossible to find a clearer imperative than this in the entire New Testament. Jesus says (1) you ought to do this, and (2) I've set an example and *you are to do* as I have done for you. This is the clarity and force we have often longed for with reference to sprinkling, the organ, and missionary societies.

How helpful it would be to have Jesus speak as clearly on these points as he does on footwashing!

Yet we disregard the literal import of these words without a tremor of guilt. When I turn and ask my brother, “Does this mean what it says? Do you believe it, or not?” he can only say, lamely, that this was a custom, a way of showing humility, and we can do it today through other forms. How does he know this? Does the sacred Book tell him so? No, but by an act of interpretation he arrives at it and since it is *his* interpretation, it is worthy of acceptance.

Some months ago I heard a prominent Washington, D. C. minister of the Church of Christ speak in a great public hall. After talking for nearly an hour, he told his audience: “You don’t need anyone to interpret this book to you. Just read what it says and do it!” At which moment I began to wonder about some things: If we did not need anyone to interpret the Book to us, why were we paying him so much money to come so far and talk to us about it? Wasn’t it criminal waste to pay him to do the unnecessary? We had paid for the huge hall, we had paid for the newspaper, radio and television advertisements, and we had paid to make tracts available to the audience. All we really needed to do was buy New Testaments and flood the city with them, urging each recipient to read and obey.

So why didn’t we do that? All of us know why; we wanted to be certain that “outsiders” got *our* understanding of that Book. We did not want to risk the chance that without our expert help they might not see things the way we do. We wanted our brother, a powerful speaker, to tell them what the Bible taught and then tell them where to find it, so that there would be no danger of their interpreting improperly. For the same reason we flooded the market with our own tracts, rather than with New Testaments. We used to say of written creeds that if they had more than the Bible, they had too much, and if less than the Bible, too little, and if they were just like the Bible, then they weren’t needed. Should we reason so about our tracts on baptism and music? If they are more than just a collection of unadorned verses (in itself a distortion, since they inevitably appear out of context), then they represent a point of view. Which is precisely what they do represent, of course: our interpretation of the New Testament’s comments about baptism. That the interpretation may be completely accurate is beside the question. The point at issue is whether we interpret, and it is crystal clear that we do.

We need not *change* our understanding just because we admit that our views represent the best interpretations we can make. We may still urge others, with passion and honesty, to accept interpretations we believe are right. But once we see clearly that *revelation* is God’s action, while *interpretation* is man’s action, we can give up the assumption that all our views are infallible.

At that precise moment we shall rejoin the human race.

Robert Meyers is Professor of English at Friends University in Wichita, Kansas, and he ministers to the Riverside Church of Christ in that city.

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Truth Seekers' FORUM

CURTIS H. LYDIC, Editor

The purpose of this FORUM is to provide a medium for the free exchange of views by Christians. We invite you to share your thoughts with us. They need not be sympathetic with or a reflection of our own views in order to be printed. Pen names or initials will be used with all submitted materials unless I am specifically requested to do otherwise. Material appearing without either name or initials may be ascribed to the editor.

Articles submitted should be typed, one or two pages, double spaced. Send all material to me at 1703 Loop 288 So., Denton, Texas, 76201.

WHAT IS A DENOMINATION?

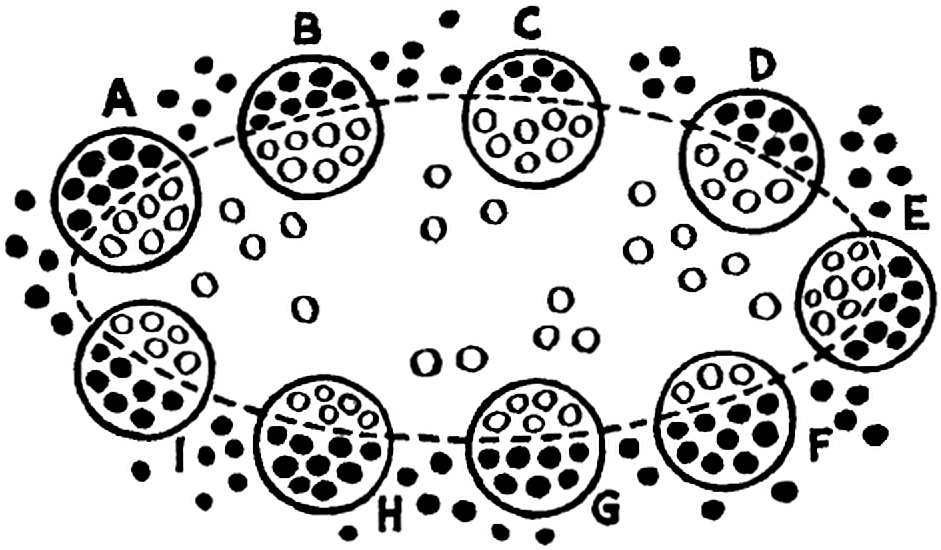
Last month some questions which were submitted by a reader were presented for your consideration. They referred to the nature of denominationalism. Assuming that you have given them some consideration, perhaps you are ready for the subject to be taken up again. What, indeed, is denominationalism?

Webster's Unabridged Dictionary gives, as the primary meaning of the word *denominate*, "to give a name to." To the word *denomination* is assigned both of these meanings: " 1. the act of denominating or naming. 2. a general name for a class of like individuals." While the modern dictionary is not a reliable reference for definition of *Bible* terms, the words under consideration, being non-Biblical and modern, are subject to such definition. So, it is evident that for a group to adopt a name for the identification of their members is for that group to denominate themselves, and make of themselves a denomination, in the truest and most literal sense of the word. For those who do so to deny to their denominational character as a group is like a mother and father with children denying that they are a *family*. Contrary to a prevalent notion, denominational status is not determined by the degree of a group's conformance to scripture in teaching and practice, but by their own use of a proper name as a group distinction.

Of all the denominations with which I am acquainted, only one consistently and emphatically seeks to disclaim its denominational status, and this group, ironically, possibly makes more of their chosen proper name than any other group. The members of this denomination typically believe that their brotherhood (the circle of their fellowship) is identical with the body of Christ, or at least that part of it which is whole and healthy, spiritually. They teach, in effect, "This is that which was spoken by the Apostle Paul in

Eph. 4:4, saying ‘There is one body’ (church); this is that one true church, the Church of Christ.”

Members of the Church of Christ are members of a denomination (according to the definition of the word) by choice. By their insistence upon the use of that name as a means of distinction, they are insistently denominational. Further, according to the New Testament definition of the true church, the Church of. Christ (denomination) is not to be equated with that true church in any unique or exclusive way; it no more represents that great body than does any other denomination. I refer you to the accompanying diagram.



The genuine church of Christ, the catholic body, the assembly of saints enrolled in heaven, the family of God consists of all the saved. It contains all the saved and none of the unsaved. It is represented in the diagram by the dotted line (because the complete scope of its membership is unknown to men). The small spots represent human souls; the black are the unsaved, the white the redeemed children of God. Note that there are no white spots outside the dotted line, and no black spots within. The circles arranged around the dotted line are religious organizations, or. denominations. It is not necessary to identify them all, and the total number shown has no significance. These circles contain both black and white spots, as, I believe, various denominations may count as members both those who are regenerated and those who are not. Who will deny that there may be true children of God on the membership rolls of various denominations? Who will deny that . there may be some make-believe Christians (insincere or non-serious church-members) on the same rolls? If both these possibilities are conceded, the diagram presents a true picture in this respect. It “is evident, then, that what is characteristic of the universal church of Christ is not true of anyone of these distinctively named groups; that is, inclusion of all the saved *and* exclusion of all the unsaved. Whether Group A or B names. itself “Church of Christ”

or not, it cannot claim to encompass *all* the redeemed and *none* of the unredeemed; therefore, it cannot claim (with validity) to be "the true church."

There are some Christians (see center of diagram) who are not affiliated with any denomination. They may be organized as congregations, but if they do not attempt to distinguish themselves from other Christians by "denominating" themselves, they remain literally "non-denominational."

At another time we will give consideration to the concept of "sectarianism," as an extension of this theme.

--- FORUM EDITOR

John and Joe Again

"John and Joe are both Christians, sharing a common hope and faith. But they differ on some matters: John believes in infant baptism while Joe does not believe in any water baptism at all; and Joe objects to the idea that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, and holds to what some call the "Unitarian" concept of Jesus, though he attends worship with John. Moreover, Joe partakes of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, while John objects to this. While neither endorses everything the other does they can nonetheless enjoy fellowship with each other.

Is there anything unscriptural about their relationship or anything wrong with this view of fellowship?

--- J. M.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Readers are referred to TSF for February of this year, in which "M. Friendly" posed the original "John and Joe" question The above version has been submitted by a reader who apparently feels he has described a parallel situation. What do YOU think? What is YOUR answer?*

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We still have back numbers at the low rate of ten for $3. These are the quarterly issues of RESTORATION REVIEW *of 32 pages each (some are 65 pages). The present monthly numbers (this is the fourth one) can be ordered at ten cents each, or we can begin your subscription with the January issue if your request it.*

The May issue will include such articles as NEUROTIC GUILT IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST *by M. F. Cottrell,* A CHRIST-CENTERED EMPHASIS *by Terence Johnson,* INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC AND UNITY *by M. Watterworth, along with editorials on* AN OPEN LETTER TO A DIVIDED BROTHERHOOD *and* A UNITY PLEA SPELLED OUT, *announced for this issue, but delayed until the May issue.*

We regret that we are late getting this number off the press, the May issue is mostly in type already, so it should be issued the middle of the month, our intended time of publication.

You can receive this 20-page journal at the low rate of 50 cents in clubs of six or more. Send a list in time for the next issue!

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